

THE CALL OF ALGONQUIN

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necessary were we allowed to carry. They taught us to paddle in true Indian style. They may not have had the gift of oral teaching, but the demonstrations of their techniques in a canoe we never forgot.

The first canoe trip that set out from Tanamakoon was unaccountably late in returning. They were expected not later than five o'clock on the appointed day, but when six, seven, eight came and no campers, I was frantic. My mother, who was a guest at the time, was in a worse state. She vowed the whole venture of a camp in that wild country was a terrible mistake. Finally at nine p.m. we heard the sound of the paddles coming up the narrows. The trippers landed at the dock in high spirits and considered our anxiety over their late arrival all part of the lark. I might add that in all the twenty-eight years that was the only trip that ever came in after dark and that my mother and father both grew to love the Park as much as I did. They visited us for a few days each year as long as they were able.

We were rather overrun with bears that first year, especially in the spring when they came out of hibernation. Often hearing a noise in the middle of the night we would start off heroically with flashlight in hand to see what was going on. We would arrive in time to see old bruin lumbering off into the woods, after having helped himself to a roast of beef, a can of milk or a carton of biscuits. These four-footed visitors were harmless, but when they became a nuisance we had to ask headquarters for a permit to use a gun. Wolves were a different matter. We knew they were in the vicinity, for night after night the stillness of the evening was shattered by their long-drawn howl from the opposite shore, a sound which only wolves can make.

Only on one occasion, however, did any of us ever see a wolf. That was when a few years later, a taciturn Indian guide called Mat, who never used two words when one

would do, took out a canoe trip. Suddenly one of the group saw two sandy coloured animals in the distance. "Are they wolves?" she asked. "Wolves", affirmed Mat, and the great occasion moved the silent guide to add, "Second time I see a wolf in nine years in Park."

The whole summer of that first year was an exciting adventure from beginning to end. Everything was a new experience, the first morning dip, the first cook-out, the first canoe trip, even the first bear and the first wolf howl. Later camps were better as far as organization was concerned, but none could have been more full of adventure than the first.

CHAPTER 4

Growing Up

No, THERE never could be another summer such as the first. During the next few years, however, there was steady growth and steady improvement in every respect and year by year our vision was widening. Tanamakoon was growing up.

The counsellors became more efficient and took responsibility in a new way. I was no longer doing something on my own. The campers grew in number — 45, 65, 85, 110—and the camp expanded as the need arose. New cabins, a refrigeration plant, an infirmary, and a craft shop were built.

In September of the first year the counsellor-training course had been established. Horseback riding at that camp had been so successful under Captain Finney that by the second year it had been added to the summer camp programme and soon rivalled canoe trips in popularity. Trails had been made connecting the camp with the old wagon roads to Nominigan and Minnesing Camps and as long as we had the opportunity of using them the riding was a never-ending source of pleasure.

The first long trip through the forest to Minnesing

inspired the favourite riding song, extolling the thrill of riding on the trails by the lake in the forest, to the tune of "D'ye ken John Peel?"

At the end of each month we had a horse show, or a gymkhana as we called it. When old campers of those days get together, among the happy memories invoked the gymkhanas always come first.

They began as a rule with a musical ride. Then came tests in horsemanship, for which coveted ribbons were pinned on the bridles, then followed jumping contests and games for each age group, and always musical chairs at the end. That was the favourite game.

Usually Molly the workhorse was brought in, bedecked with ferns and ribbons, adding much gaiety and colour to the occasion. Sometimes in her wagon rode a picturesque band of gypsies with their bandanas and ribboned tambourines and guitars.

The horses were real personalities to the campers, who knew all their little characteristics, just as we knew the campers'.

No wonder a strange legend grew up in the camp of an amazing celebration where no human was present. It was said to have taken place one midnight after a gymkhana. Nine horses one after another stole out of the barn and silently made their way to the riding ring where a fire had been set ablaze. One by one they took their places in a circle—Pegasus, Goldie, Cairn, Queenie, Ted, Darkie, Personality, Diamond and Colourful. When all were in place Pegasus rose to speak. "Now we must be quiet or Jack will be down to send us back. They're so fussy about us getting our sleep. As if rest hour wasn't relaxation enough." They sang their own version of the riding song, Goldie rising to beat time with his dainty hoof. "Hee Haw!" they chorused in their own praise,

though Goldie pointed out to Queenie that she was off key.

"Ever since Goldie was chosen for the horse management test she has been too cocky" muttered Darkie to Colourful. "Personally I think my jumping was the only finished performance in the gymkhana this afternoon, and I did win the musical-chairs contest."

Cairn lay on his back and kicked his legs in the air. "It's such a joke that they think we don't know how to play that game by ourselves, as if we needed people to guide us to the chairs." Lying on their backs they had a star-gazing contest to see who could find Pegasus' namesake in the sky. Then Molly arrived with plates of hay and apples on her back and after much munching they stamped out the fire like good campers, and all raced down for a dip.

For what it is worth, this is the story. Believe it or not as you will.

As time went by various groups of visitors found their way into camp. Our first, a number of English and Welsh teachers who for some unknown reason had been routed through Algonquin Park on their way to an educational conference in Toronto. They had walked through the woods in city clothes and shoes, and arrived hot, tired and hungry. We entertained them with tea, cookies and ice-cream, and they in turn richly repaid us with Old Country songs sung by glorious voices. A year later a number of English school girls, twenty-five in all, came to Canada under the auspices of the Society of Overseas Settlement of British Women. Half the group went to Glen Bernard Camp near Sundridge, Ontario, for five days; the other half came to Tanamakoon. Our guests represented Rodean, Wycombe Abbey, St. Mary's, and Cheltenham College.

At about the same time we were advised that Lord and

Lady Willingdon were in the vicinity and might visit the camp. The next day word came that we were to expect them in two hours' time. In the meantime we had arranged a programme we thought might interest them. All the campers were spick and span in fresh camp suits, and all were waiting at the dock to welcome them. We put on a demonstration first — our famous canoe parade with its intricate figures and circles, difficult to perfect but beautiful to watch. This was followed by swimming and riding displays. Then morning coffee was served. The visit ended in the craft shop.

As Their Excellencies' motorboat left the dock to take them on their way, we gave our Royal salute. The campers formed an avenue of canoes and the launch passed through the uplifted paddles, our tribute to the most distinguished guests yet to visit us.

In 1931 we had a new superintendent in the Park, Mr. F. A. MacDougall, a man of vision and action. He was the first "flying superintendent"; the patrolling of the Park was now done from a plane and the fire towers were no longer in use. A road was being cut from Dwight right through the Park to Whitney, Barry's Bay, Killaloe and Eganville. The first survey came perilously close to Tanamakoon and threatened our privacy, but later, happily for us, it was routed a little to the north and we were spared. There is a full mile between Tanamakoon and Highway No. 60. Apparently this road was built to give employment during the depression. Having been able to reach the Park only by train or canoe, the building of the road was an event. Although many opposed it, it made the Park accessible to thousands of people. The new road made it possible to reach Algonquin from Toronto in a little over five hours. It was always with a sense of expectancy that we drove over that road, for one never knew what wild creature might dart out into our path.

Sometimes it was a fox and her family or a bear and her cubs, and there were always deer to be seen. Today, the parked cars and the people stopping to feed the deer out of their hands and take pictures have become quite a road hazard. As a matter of fact, in travelling through the Park one does not see much of Algonquin from the road. To properly appreciate the wonders of Algonquin it is necessary to travel its lakes and rivers by canoe.

Recently attractive stone entrance gates have been erected, where officials supply information and issue travelling and fishing permits.

Many of the lakes of the Park were being renamed about this time, and Whites' Lake became Tanamakoon Lake. Lost Lake, which was so mysterious and hard to find, became Found Lake, Found, we thought, because Highway 60 skirted its shore. But apparently there was more involved in renaming the lakes than we had dreamed of. Tanamakoon was given the privilege of naming one lake after the camper who had contributed most to camp during that summer. The unanimous vote went to Nadine Ysaye who had instilled in us a love of good music. Nadine came to Tanamakoon at the age of fifteen. The camp felt her presence and has shown marks of it ever since. It was not only that she was a granddaughter of the great Belgian violinist, Eugene Ysaye, and had spent much of her childhood under his roof and caught the spirit of music in that atmosphere. It was not only that her mother was an opera singer, and that Nadine had had the enviable chance of becoming familiar with the great operas. These influences had undoubtedly helped to make Nadine, but she was a real person in her own right. Miss Mona Bates, an outstanding teacher of piano in Toronto, had helped her discipline her natural gifts, and during her ten years as camper and counsellor the camp rang with her music. She made us respect music. While she

was there the camp was the recipient of a very fine grand piano, the gift of Lady Eaton. One day Nadine discovered that some luckless camper had stuck her chewing gum under the ledge of this piano, and the burst of rage with which she announced her discovery was awe inspiring, especially when she followed the discovery with a talk the next day at assembly on the time and expert care that went into the making of the grand, and the seven years of seasoning required for its wood.

No wonder campers dared not go within three feet of the sublime instrument for the rest of the summer.

Yes, Nadine had taught us the joy of good music. We flew over Nadine Lake one sunny day. It was in the northwest section of the Park, nestled in among the hills, silently recording one camper's contribution to the camp through her rare gift of music.

Today Nadine Lake is a special favourite of fishermen because of its speckled trout.

The account of those early days would not be complete without some mention of the stories around the campfire told by a counsellor rarely gifted in the art of story telling. The campfires of her time are still vivid in the minds of those who revelled in the humour and pathos of her tales. She had a knack of weaving the events of the day into the historic scenes and always stopped at the breath-taking moment and left her listeners spellbound.

One of the mainstays of the camp was George. George came to us in the early thirties. Our first introduction to him arose through our pump going out of order, a serious handicap. I was told no one in the Park could fix it but George May. We asked him to come. He arrived in a canoe with his wife, hopped out, leaving her sitting there; fixed the pump in a flash, and with a cheery word or two was gone; leaving an impression of lightning efficiency which I will never forget.

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George was taking care of Nominigan at that time. Later that year the cabins and boathouse at Nominigan were burned. The Main Lodge was afterwards sold as a summer home to Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Northway. Now George was available. We tried in vain to entice him to Tanamakoon. Two years later, in 1930, he gave in and came, and he has been there ever since. To anyone who has ever been at Tanamakoon, George is a personage, a friend to everyone. A visitor to camp one weekend was much impressed by his care of a little fawn. She said: "To see a man, a busy woodsman like George, kneeling with a bottle beside a half-dead, deserted little fawn, was a lesson in humility. He waited patiently till it would raise its head and drink and live. Then, when George rose to go, to see it stagger to its feet and follow, trusting the big human to whom it owed its life, was a revelation."

A tiny fawn with its soft coat, and neat polished hoofs, endears itself to anyone, but a "woodland pussy" is different. One day as George was coming in by boat he saw one of those little animals running around with its head caught in a bottle. The pussy met him as he landed, and George tried to knock off the bottle with his paddle. That did not work; so he put out his hand to pull it off. With that gesture the skunk put its two paws on George's wrist and they both pulled. Off it came and George went on his way uncontaminated. We will hear more of George as we go along.

George's fawn was not the first we adopted at Tanamakoon. One year Mary Ann, the Park superintendent's daughter, came to camp and brought Flag. Flag was a little five-week-old fawn whose mother had been killed on the highway. He was perfectly at home with the campers from the beginning. When they were at assembly and he was left out he would bleat at the door till he was admitted. As he grew older he was allowed to roam in

the daytime, but we never went to bed without knowing that Flag was safely tucked in too. He had not learned to fend for himself and could not be left alone in the fall, so one of the Park rangers took him home and cared for him. Up to this time we had not found what we really wanted in the way of a camp crest. Now there was no doubt—Flag was it.

Another fawn we adopted was Bambi. The campers took care of him during the summer and at the end of the season he was taken home by George (with the permission of the Park Headquarters). George's daughter Carol, a Tanamakoon camper, looked after him all winter and he was brought back in the spring. Gradually he was accepted by the other deer so that at the end of the second summer he was safe in the woods with his kind. Wild deer, we discovered, are always suspicious of those which have been domesticated, and are apt to boycott them.



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